THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER,

OR,

THE PRICE OF "VIRTUE."

BY

RACHEL CAMPBELL.

Price ten cents.

Published, and sold by the author, at Grass Valley, California.

1885.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

An essay read before the New England Free Love League in Science Hall, Boston, Feb. 1881,

By Rachel Campbell.

Mr. President, Gentlemen and Ladies: Although this is a convention of the Free Love League, I do not propose to make Free Love the subject of my remarks to day. I believe I can better serve the sacred cause of Freedom by calling your attention to quite another matter. The principles of Social Freedom have been, not only logically stated, clearly defined and ably advocated many times at these conventions, but every argument brought against us by honest opposition has been abundantly met and overthrown. So long as I felt that we were misunderstood, that truly good people, not quite comprehending the ethics of Free Love, were sincere in the belief that the tendency of our doctrine is to encourage sensualism, I was ever ready to define, to reason and to explain, to go over the ground again and again, repeating, restating, answering every possible objection and making our meaning clear. Now, I think we are fully understood. There exists no necessity for further explanation or repetition. It is not honest thought and honorable opposition with which we have to deal. Organized oppression is well aware of our aim and purpose to effectually overthrow and destroy every form of tyranny and injustice, and to break every yoke and fetter that cripples the growth or hinders the happiness of humanity. The aristocracy of religion has joined hands with the aristocracy of wealth and their united powers are used to influence legislation and procure the enactment of such laws as will enable them, under the pretense of guarding good morals, to persecute reformers, forbid agitation and stifle inquiry, the more effectually to crush out and smother all freedom either of thought, speech or action. Our enemies realize full well that institutions of tyranny and wrong grow weak in proportion to the growth of intelligence among the people; hence it is, that heroic individuals, reformers, men who hold the welfare of the race of more worth than personal safety, who call liberal conventions, write and circulate liberal books, publish Free-thought papers, and otherwise devote themselves to the cause of the common people, are slandered, arrested, fined, imprisoned,—anything to insure their silence and thus prevent the spread of radical ideas.

The leaders in this unholy warfare, waged against free speech and a free press, are unscrupulous, designing men, who perpetrate wickedness knowingly and from evil motives, but the multitude who follow them and keep up the "hue and cry" of "obscenity," are not necessarily bad people. They are rather those who, too indolent or too superstitious to think for themselves, accept as truth the traditions of the Elders, and believe in the divine origin of old customs and institutions. They are taught to consider the copulative act as being all there is in the sexual problem,—a surrender to a carnal appetite at best, but licensed and protected by monogamic marriage in the very best manner possible. They believe that in some mysterious manner the marriage ceremony changes a very vile and sinful act to a pure and sinless one. Just how this mysterious power operates in changing uncleanness to chastity, sin to righteousness, they are unable to say, but they accept it as emblematical of the atoning power of the blood of Jesus which cleanses from all sin,—Christian marriage being symbolical of the Christian religion they would no more dare to doubt the perfection of the one than the holiness of the other.

So long as people are Christians, and believe in the deep sinfulness of humanity, and that sexuality in the flesh is analogous to total depravity in the spiritual nature, it is useless to expect from them a rational and scientific consideration of the sex question. There are those however who claim to be freethinkers, who repudiate Christianity utterly, who believe the old tree of religious superstition is rotten, root and branch, and yet, they are ready to stone us because we pronounce its fruit unwholesome. With one hand they smite the Christian Church and with the other they defend an institution that symbolizes the Christian religion, and incarnates the very elements of tyranny and slavishness they denounce and condemn. They laugh at the assumptions of Jehovah and neglect to honor, worship, praise and glorify him forever and ever, amen, because such slavish sycophancy is unbecoming the dignity of manhood; but they can ape Jehovah in the role of husband and find the servile submission of a wife charming and womanly.

It is for just this class of persons, those who can think and dare think, but who don't think, that I have prepared the following pages. I wish to call their attention to the actual condition of society here and now, under our present social system which they seem to think furnishes the only soil in which sexual virtue can grow and flourish. I propose to point out to them the mouse in the social meal, and to ask in all candor whether we are not paying for "virtue" more than it is worth?

I will not go into respectable homes to reveal the skeleton only half hidden in family closets, nor tell the sad story of motherhood ground to the dust under the misrule of masculine ignorance and usurpation. Abler pens than mine are already busy with this part of the work, so I

will turn my attention to that part of the social vineyard given over to the growth of weeds and brambles. The bickering and strife, the misery and crime, the suicides and murders that grow out of marital infelicity, are bad enough in themselves to condemn the system that produces them, but they are only a part of the price paid for the maintenance of compulsory monogamy. Beyond and beneath all these the lurid fires of illegal prostitution are kept continually burning.

The social question will never be understood in its wholeness until the "social evil" receives its due share of inquiry and investigation. The courtesan and the brothel are facts in our boasted civilization just as real as our homes and firesides, and just as much a part of the woman question. Just now, people are asking, what shall we do with our girls? and the subject should enlist the careful thought of all, but it is equally important that we ask ourselves, what have we done with our girls? not the eminently good ones; not the well balanced and the strong ones, but the wayward, the weak and the erring; those who have been too credulous or too loving; those who, from whatever cause, have failed to preserve a virtuous reputation,—in short, *what have we done with our prodigal daughters?*

We are told that society must protect itself, must shield its wives and daughters from all dangerous, contaminating contact with those who are fallen below the standard of sexual morality, and in various ways express its high regard for the pure and chaste woman, and its deep abhorrence for the frail and tarnished one. However pleasant it may be for men to associate with immoral women at certain times, and in certain places, it is essential to the preservation of purity in the home that the woman they honor by the choice of wife should be pure and stainless. For this reason our daughters are early taught to expect no mercy if they fail in this direction and richly merit their fate when they disobey. They deserve no consideration whatever, but must be weeded out from among women, branded with dishonor and driven into the streets in order that the virtue and purity of other women may be more carefully preserved and more safely protected.

It is not always necessary that a woman be convicted; it is often quite enough if she be but suspected. The "unco guid" have a saying, which they flippantly quote in affairs of this kind, something like this: when the down is brushed off a peach it may as well be thrown into the basket with the rotten ones; and this rule, with a very little malicious gossip is enough to make "virtue" an uncertain possession at best. A woman may be amiable, truthful and generous, but, however well endowed otherwise with womanly excellence, it will avail her nothing if convicted of loving "not wisely, but too well." She is straitway banished from home and friends, an abandoned outcast, too vile and abominable to breathe the same air with virtuous women, all chance to live an honorable life

denied her, her place is henceforth with the fallen, the infamous and the outlawed. The door to honest industry is effectually barred against her,—no one may walk with her, no one may talk with her, no one may give her employment.

This is the verdict of society, and Mrs. Grundy is commissioned to execute the sentence. It is a work she especially delights in, and under her watchful care, the "garden of girls" is very certain to be thoroughly weeded. She may uproot and destroy a great many white ones, in her zeal to get at the dark ones, but she will take good care that none with spot or stain be allowed to escape.

According to statistics there are, in the various towns and cities in the United States, five hundred thousand women who make sexual prostitution their regular business, and obtain a livelihood thereby. From the same source we learn that the average length of a woman's life after entering upon this vocation is only five years; and as their numbers do not grow less, even with this fearful death rate, the conclusion is forced upon us, that one hundred thousand new victims are added to the ranks each year. According to time honored custom, these women are relegated to the bottomless pit of social perdition, a place, by the way, that typifies the orthodox lake of fire and brimstone, and is always open to receive such as have had the sentence, "depart ye cursed," pronounced upon them by a Judge too holy to "look upon sin with the least degree of allowance."

Not until we stop and think how many units it takes to make up a hundred thousand, and that each separate unit represents the broken life and dishonored death of a homeless, abandoned woman, and then remember that this sum of misery is but a part of the tax annually paid for "virtue," can we realize the price at which it is bought, and the prop on which it rests. One hundred thousand girls, annually going out from the homes where they have grown from infancy to womanhood,—somebody's daughters! somebody's sisters! driven forth to disgrace and death, weeded out from among their sister women in order to make sure of feminine "virtue" in society.

We can well remember the sorrow and anguish that filled our hearts when civil war called for a "hundred thousand more" of our boys. How sisters wept and mothers prayed as they took up their line of march for Southern battle fields; and yet, however sad the fact of their going forth from home and loved ones, to meet danger and perhaps death, may seem, it is nothing in comparison with the downward march of their frail and fallen sisters. The "boys in blue" enlisted at the call of duty and patriotism, and felt the inspiration of a noble deed in every risk they dared. They went, cheered by the loving sympathy and grateful admiration of their wives and mothers, sisters and sweethearts left at home. Every mail carried to them letters of encouragement, bidding them be

hopeful, and picturing a glad and triumphant return "when the cruel war is over." At the worst it was honorable death they braved; but we missed them from their accustomed places, and our hearts ached because of their hardship and danger. Somehow we never wearied of talking about them, praising their virtues and excusing their vices, until "even their failings leaned to virtue's side." Then, how we mourned the dead! Sorrow and mourning pervaded the entire community, and friends and neighbors wept in sympathy with each stricken household. Tenderly, tearfully we laid them away, while tolling bells and martial music pealed forth in honor of the fallen soldier. "Our nation's dead," we call them, because their lives were given in defense of our common country, with its happy homes and pleasant firesides. It is not too much that a grateful people consecrate one day in the year to the work of keeping their memory green, and their resting places decorated with flowers.

But to this other army of five hundred thousand girls, avowedly sacrificed to maintain purity in the home and monogamy in society, we give shame instead of honor, scorn instead of admiration, and hatred instead of gratitude. The hardships and horrors of their condition excite no pity; no tears are shed for their sakes; hearts are flint and faces are stony! Driven in disgrace from their homes, and passing out of sight forever; suffering we know not what, and dying we care not how or when,—all we have to say, is, that it isn't fashionable to speak of this class of persons or feel any interest in them whatever. Those who claim that we could not be happy in heaven, knowing that our friends were in hell, must have failed to notice how cheerfully righteous (?) women turn away from friends and sisters when guilt and shame overtake them.

The most blind and bigoted devotee of the Catholic Church, that ever lived in old Spain, never gave up a friend to the Holy Inquisition more readily and cheerfully than respectable families give their girls into the hands of Madame Grundy. The mother forgets the babe she cradled so lovingly in her bosom, and the father turns with curses from his door the "wee girlie" that used to play and prattle about his knees.

We shudder with horror at the story of heathen mothers, throwing their babes beneath the car of their idol, and then dragging its ponderous wheels over the mangled, bleeding bodies, but we have become so accustomed to the idolatry of Christendom, that its actual horrors enacted here at home, in our very midst, hardly attract our attention. We think it is well, and look on without compassion, while our Social Juggernaut crushes its murderous way, not over the helpless bodies of unconscious infants, but through the broken lives and quivering hearts of tortured, suffering womanhood.

Is it not about time to pause for a moment, and consider whether we are not paying too high a price for virtuous monogamy after all? Let us examine our purchase a little and see if it is really worth this terrible

waste of womanhood. I appreciate the worth of clean habits and pure lives, and render due honor to every man and woman who live true to their best and highest conception of sexual purity and truth ; but cleanliness, fidelity and truth are not essential ingredients in the make up of sexual virtue, as the term is commonly understood. A woman may possess all these qualities in unstinted measure, and yet lack "virtue," or, she may be sadly deficient in all the nobler traits of character and be virtuous. Sexual attraction, natural, orderly, and obedient to the higher law of love, is not virtue in the popular sense of the word. Fashionable, respectable virtue is always of the feminine gender, and measured by the legal standard. A woman, to be virtuous, must live a celibate or else become a legal wife ; something she cannot be without a personal surrender of herself into the keeping of a husband, and an agreement to serve him sexually for the rest of her life according to the law of marriage,—a law, by the way, so constructed and administered that there is no phase of sexual abomination that may not be practiced with its full sanction. It justifies mercenary marriage and gives a license for excess and debauchery. The most cruel outrage and abuse will receive its benediction if they bear the semblance of monogamy and the seal of law.

Let me give one example to show the peculiar character of this expensive sham, bowed down to and worshipped as sexual virtue. The coarsest, filthiest and most sensual animal in human form may associate with a woman, so he be her husband, may treat her in the most shameful and brutal manner that woman was ever treated by man, may infect her with sexual disease until her whole system teems with rottenness without any damage to her virtue. The marriage certificate does double duty ; it is at once his license and her shield of honor. Her health, her happiness, and even her life may be destroyed, but her virtue is safe. On the other hand, suppose a pair of young and ardent lovers reveling in the delicious rapture of love's young dream, no legal marriage unites them, but being healthy and happy, and well endowed with the sexual imponderable, they find each other "just too sweet for anything," and drink of "stolen waters," and what is the result ? Well, nothing as far as the boy is concerned ; he isn't damaged any, but alas, for the girl ! her virtue is lost ! she is fallen ! dishonored ! *ruined forever!*

Seriously, friends, I ask again, does not what we call virtue cost more than it is worth ? Can we not conceive a higher law of sex union, a holier relationship between man and woman, than the one patterned after the covenant between the Jewish God and his chosen people ? A person would be thought crazy who should seriously propose such a rule for masculine virtue as the one by which women are measured. No one thinks of separating the bad boy from his home and friends, thus shutting him away from all good influences. A boy sows his "wild oats," as a matter of course, and then settles down into a sober industrious man,

and becomes a good husband, a fond parent, and perhaps a distinguished citizen ; and there is no reason in nature, why the girl who was his partner in the wild oat business, should not become a good wife, a loving mother, and a valued member of society. No good reason can be given why the door of reform is ever held invitingly open for a boy, and bolted and barred against a girl. Surely the old plan has been in operation a sufficient length of time to be now judged by its works. We have faithfully tried the experiment for ages ; have dealt kindly and charitably with our prodigal sons, and harshly and cruelly with their wayward sisters ; now let us carefully compare the results, and see if we are acting wisely in thus discriminating against our girls. No one supposes that women would be any worse than men are if allowed the same freedom of action ; let us see how much better they are now. We will take women, choice and select, after this process of weeding out the soiled ones has been going on for centuries, and weigh them against men as we find them now, and see how they compare in regard to manly and womanly excellence. Are women really any better than men after all ? are they as a rule more honorable and upright in their every day life ? are they more truth-loving and truth-telling ? are their friendships more tender and lasting ? do they rank very much higher than men in any quality that goes to make up a noble character ? Doubtless their sexual habits do come nearer to the popular idea of virtue, but will this difference constitute a balance in woman's favor sufficient to outweigh the sin and shame of five hundred thousand girls abandoned to a life of infamy and disgrace ?

Whoever begins to investigate the "social evil" will find a subject not easily exhausted. It has more heads than the wonderful beast described in St. John's Revelations, while its cancerous roots penetrate and poison every department of social and domestic life. The full tariff for the protection of "virtue" is not paid when our girls are thus ruthlessly sacrificed. These five hundred thousand women, shut out from industrial pursuits, and denied the chance to labor for their livelihood, are nevertheless housed and fed and clothed. For their support a sum of money must come from some source, as large as would be required to maintain a standing army of half a million soldiers. We hear very little grumbling, it is true, about the payment of this burdensome tax, but we know it is paid all the same, and whether it be paid directly from the pockets of the workingman, or indirectly, from the hands of the wealthy, we know the whole burden rests perpetually on the shoulders of working men and working women. Nor is this all : the outcast is still a woman, actuated by the good and evil impulses that go to make up our human nature, and does not patiently bear the cruel treatment she receives. Sneers and taunts from happier women meet her whatever way she turns ; and envy and hatred beget in her a spirit of retaliation. Goaded by grief, shame and indignation she becomes bitter and revengeful towards the

society that is crushing her, and strikes back the women who scorn her, by using her power to influence for evil, their sons, husbands and brothers, who still follow her, love her and secretly associate with her.

Next, let us endeavor to trace out, if possible, some of the many ways leading from what is called good, respectable society, to the domain of ostracism, prostitution and ill fame, and discover the causes that induce so many women to walk in them. It will not do to assume, as society evidently does, that these women are prostitutes from choice, selecting this mode of life because of their own depraved tendencies. Let us rather examine carefully and critically the construction of society, and perhaps we may find too heavy burdens resting on the shoulders of the weak and helpless. When "the truth comes uppermost," it may show us that society is the real culprit, and that the Magdalen is "more sinned against than sinning." That there may be some naturally passionate, amorous girls, who rebel against conventional rules, and seek from choice a place where their sexual desires may be indulged without restraint, I do not deny; but I think such cases are very rare. Passionate women are not a product of our present civilization,—a fact that husbands whine over most dolefully.

There is a law of heredity, well understood among stock breeders, that in order to establish and maintain desirable points and qualities in their stock it is necessary to breed only from such animals as have these points and qualities prominent and well developed; or, on the other hand, if it is desirable to eliminate and get rid of certain qualities, it is only necessary to select for breeding purposes such animals as are poorly endowed therewith. In accordance with this law, the practice pursued by society of weeding out the ardent, passionate girls, and selecting for motherhood only the cold and passive ones, has produced its legitimate effect, in giving us a race of passionless women, so poorly endowed sexually, that their husbands feel justified in seeking pleasanter relations elsewhere. For this reason, I believe that this immense army of prostitutes contains only a very small percentage of volunteers. I believe that the great majority of these women are forced into the ranks of prostitution after honestly and earnestly struggling against it. I also believe, and propose to show that both our industrial and social systems tend directly to force working girls into this way of living, by making it always very hard, and often quite impossible for them to obtain a livelihood by honest industry, and that monogamic marriage, more than anything else, is responsible for it.

The pitiful wages received by women for work performed have more to do with prostitution than many people think. Barely enough to sustain them comfortably while they are healthy and work every day; but leaving them to beg, or do worse, whenever sickness, dull times, or bad luck of any sort overtakes them. The working woman who would live on her

daily wages must confine herself to the bare necessities of life, and never know the luxury of aiding another. She may see her sisters, her parents or her children suffering from cold and hunger, but the price of her labor is not enough to enable her to relieve them. There is one way, and one only, in which a woman so situated, can find food and fire for her loved ones ; there is always a ready purchaser for that pearl of great price, her "virtue." Indeed, I have no doubt there are many women among us, whom we treat with scorn and call prostitutes, who have become such through maternal or filial devotion, so true and unselfish that angels, looking from above and seeing their motives, would pronounce the deed consecration rather than prostitution.

It has been said, and truly too : "All that a man hath will he give for his life," and with equal truth the same may be said of woman ; so, when we consider the weary, hopeless lives of working girls in shops and factories ; going home at night, after long hours of toil, to lonely attics or cheap and cheerless boarding houses,—poorly fed, poorly warmed and poorly clothed, and above all, feeling themselves wronged, neglected and uncared for,—can we wonder that they lose hope and courage, and recklessly barter their birthright for a mess of pottage ? The struggle for life is too much for them, and they seem doomed from the beginning. I meet pale, sad, discouraged girl-faces on the streets every day, and I know the tempter stands waiting for them on every street corner, smiling to deceive and alluring to betray. It is not the sweet lipped seducer, flattering girlish vanity, but an experienced man of the world who has gold to back his suit, an employer of girls, perhaps, who has grown rich on the labor of half paid women. It is an unequal contest of wealth against want, of strength against weakness, of man against woman.

Society is so excessively nice about keeping the social evil covered up and out of sight, that the poor girl who has passed the enchanted land of pleasure, and reached that stage in the prostitute's career, where it "biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder," the suffering one, who carries in her face the sickening evidence of disease and dissipation, can hardly walk our streets without being arrested by some watchful policeman, hurried out of sight, and perhaps locked up, for having made a spectacle of her unhappy self ; while the fresh and blooming wanton may parade her smiles, her fine dresses and costly jewels, either in handsome carriage or fashionable promenade, as much and as often as she pleases, and the guardians of morality and propriety look on admiringly without a word of censure or rebuke : thus hiding from young and inexperienced girls, who are being sorely tried and tempted, the worst features of prostitution, and permitting them to see only the shining raiment in which Easy Virtue is wont to array herself. In this way all the avenues leading to sexual prostitution are made to look broad and inviting. To the weary, overtasked woman they give a promise of rest, to the shivering

they offer shelter, to the famished, food, and to the desolate, companionship. I have sometimes questioned whether the whole masculine world were not leagued together in this business. It certainly looks enough like it to justify suspicion. The ordained minister receives a generous fee for performing the marriage ceremony, calls infidelity to marital obligations a terrible sin, and teaches patience and submission. The women of his flock receive his words as gospel-truth; the men pay his salary and "laugh in their sleeves." Large manufacturers, who employ women conspire to keep the price of work at a starvation level. Small manufacturers, not all, but many of them, knowing it impossible for their help to live on the wages paid them, play pander and introduce their gentleman friends. Our city fathers dexterously hide the repulsive features of the unholy and unnatural traffic in womanhood, and allow its gilded allurements to shine forth conspicuously. All these parties seem to be acting in concert, with a deliberate purpose to provide abundant supplies for the libertine's feast. After the banquet municipal laws and police courts come in, like menials, to sweep up the fragments, cart away the stale meat and bury the bones. I do not say for a truth this is so; I would rather think otherwise, but of this much I am sure, *if* "the boot were on the other foot," *if* five hundred thousand young men were seduced and secluded by American matrons, visited secretly in midnight revel and lewd debauch, kept as a reserve force to supply sexual demands not met in legal wedlock, our women would be thought about mean enough for any thing, and monogamic marriage would soon be known for what it really is,—a delusion and a snare.

In saying that marriage is largely responsible for the low wages of women, I am not running a tilt against that union which exists only in the dreams of poets. I mean marriage as it is exemplified in common usage, and defined in common law; where the woman is "given in marriage," and becomes a servant without wages in her husband's home. That a class of unpaid laborers will degrade any branch of industry in which they toil, has already been so clearly and forcibly shown in other departments, that we have only to apply the same logic to this one, and the point is carried. In the old days, when the abolition of negro slavery in the South was an unsettled question, we were told that slave labor tended to make the laboring white man poor and keep him so; and that free labor never can compete with slave labor without reducing the free laborer to a condition very little better than slavery. Understanding this principle, Northern working men are forming leagues to resist the encroachment of convict labor, knowing that the kind of work done by unpaid convicts will be so cheapened and degraded that free labor will be driven from the field. Now, just as slave labor operates against free labor, just as the prison system of offering cheap convict labor injures honest working men, just so wife labor affects free working women. It is the char-

acter rather than the name of anything that makes it either good or ill. The injury to labor is caused by having a class of unpaid laborers to compete with ; and whether that class be called slave, convict, or wife, the ruinous effect on free labor remains unchanged.

I am well aware that wives are not generally considered or thought of as a class of laborers, the popular opinion being that wives are a nonproducing class depending for support on the labor of their husbands. Many husbands, otherwise intelligent, whose wives toil early and late, honestly and conscientiously take to themselves the whole credit of supporting their families, and not unfrequently their hard working, overtasked wives share the delusion. Wives have worked so long without wages, that "women's work," sweeping, dusting, cooking, etc.—the never ending routine of housework that must be done in every home, is not regarded as labor exactly. It is an inferior grade, lacking the dignity and importance of man's labor, and when performed by a wife in her husband's house, has no financial value.

There is, however, another way in which wife labor tends to reduce the wages of working girls. The germ of independence has quickened in the hearts of a large majority of the wives of this age. They feel bitterly the humiliation of being obliged to ask for every dime they may need, to explain just what they wish to buy with it, and then argue the case to convince their husbands that the purchase is really necessary ; and to avoid the necessity of frequent begging, they go out to the work-shops and get sewing to do at home. They cannot leave home and work in the shops, and in order to get the work they are obliged to underbid the shop-girl and reduce her already low wages a little lower still. Married women, doing cheap work at home, make it possible for manufacturers to get fine, white shirts made for a dollar a dozen, and other kinds of shop-work at proportionally low rates. Full of their own sorrows, and adopting the only method they can find to better their own condition, wives have crowded into this field of labor, destroyed the business of the shop-girl, compelled her to work more hours for less pay, and driven her to want, poverty, destitution and prostitution.

It may perhaps be thought incredible that the condition of working girls is as bad as I have represented. I tell you it is even worse ! it can never be told, but must be endured to be understood ! Human speech cannot voice the long drawn out agony of a life, robbed of all the hopes and pleasures that make up the joy of living, and forced into a treadmill of constant toil for a bare subsistence. The best years of my life have been dragged out in a New Hampshire cotton mill, so I know what I am talking about. New England people are naturally proud of their manufactories, and many of them seem to think these are run by water power alone. This is a mistake ; the water power only propels the machinery. Another force is requisite to make the machinery effective. A deep, full

current of human life is constantly pouring in, as freely as the water and almost as fast. Women and children especially, are being used up and worn out with a rapidity unthought of by those who look only on the surface of things. If the blood of all the victims, whose lives have been crushed and broken in the mills that stand on its banks, were spilled in its tide, the Merrimac river would flow on towards the Atlantic, as red as were the waters of the Seine on the morning of St. Bartholomew. But blood-spilling is barbarous, and puritanical New England never tolerates barbarism. She freely grants to Capital a "bond" that enables it to take from Labor the "pound of flesh," but, because of her pious, puritan faith in her own righteousness, bloodshed is forbidden. The Yankee Shylock, however, has more inventive genius than the old Jew, and finds a way to enforce his bond without either breaking the law or shocking public sentiment. Human strength and endurance are put to work against tireless machinery, in gas-poisoned rooms, until the flesh wastes and the cheek pales as the red blood is gradually transmuted into sweat and tears, and a used up operative quietly passes away to make room for a fresh hand. All the proprieties observed, and every thing done "decently and in order."

I have no fault to find with the work in a cotton factory, in and of itself. A reasonable amount of work, a reasonable number of hours for a day's labor, and reasonable wages therefor would make of mill-work pleasant and healthful employment. As it is, corporate greed has assigned to each operative too much work,—too many spindles, too many frames, too many looms etc., and insisted on too many hours in the day, and in the meantime little by little has reduced wages, till these mills, instead of being "hives of industry," as they are sometimes called, are become hells of torture where men are overworked, women are enslaved, and children sacrificed.

When I say that overwork and low wages virtually force working girls to prostitution, I do not make the assertion without having evidence to sustain it. In this matter I "speak of what I do know, and testify of what I have seen." Born a Campbell, backed by a long line of hardy, Scotch ancestry, I was endowed with more power of physical endurance than falls to the common lot of women; consequently, I have been able to stand by my looms, year after year, while one relay after another of fresh help came into the room, worked a few years, grew sick and feeble from overwork, and at last were obliged to give up and yield their places to fresh hands. I have seen young girls come into the mill, buxom and bonnie, right from their country homes, watched them as they faded year by year, and finally go back to their homes, broken in spirit, health gone,—invalids for the rest of their lives. I have observed others, of different make and temperament, whose natures were such that it was utterly impossible for them to patiently bend their necks and take on the

yoke of hard labor. The allotment of work to each worker is measured according to the capacity of skillful, capable women, and nature had not endowed them with "gumption" enough to entitle them to rank in this class. They were pretty girls, generous, amiable and good girls, but they lacked the tact and skill requisite to perform their daily tasks, and failure fretted and discouraged them. They grew restive and reckless as the burdens of their lot pressed too heavily upon them, did their work badly and were often absent, were found fault with and fined, and at last discharged; and very soon after that I met them on the street wearing the "livery of shame."

But I did not allow my acquaintance with these girls to end thus. I had begun to have radical opinions, and to judge people by their merits rather than by what was said about them. These women were my friends, and I knew the evil that had befallen them was their misfortune, but not their fault. One in particular, a "wee, winsome lassie," who had worked close beside me, I was especially interested in. She was one of those sweet, gentle darlings, who blossom out in beauty and loveliness, beloved and petted by all who know them, happy themselves and making others so, when born into homes of comfort and plenty, but who, in the atmosphere of poverty and hardship, soon sink into infamy or the grave. I won her trust and confidence by giving her what little help I could about her work, while her childish helplessness so appealed to my sympathy that I thought of her as my little sister. She did the very best she was able, but each loom was a "harp of a thousand strings," and the strings broke and tangled till she grew nervous and almost frantic. She could not weave, and she spoiled so much cloth, that, though my heart ached for the poor girl, I could not blame the overseer when he discharged her. Then followed a long and fruitless search for another place to work, till at length, hopeless and desperate, she sold herself to a "respectable," married man who had for some time been watching and waiting for just this opportunity. From this to the brothel the step was, in her case, a short one, and there I found her.

I had two motives in visiting these girls in their new homes. First, I liked them, and wanted them to know it. I wanted to help them to maintain their own self-respect, and make them hope and watch for a chance to escape from their bad surroundings, and try the game of life over again in some other way. Divorce occasionally frees a woman from the bondage of legal prostitution, and I would say to every woman who has fallen a victim to the illegal sort: break loose from unlawful bondage, and go free at the first opportunity, without asking leave of Madame Grundy or anybody else. Then again, I wanted to learn something definite about the prostitute's life. I had become conscious of a great wrong, a terrible injustice, somewhere in our civilization; something that degraded and made merchandise of the sexual nature of woman in every

department of social life. I did not then comprehend where this evil originated, nor who was to blame for it ; so I investigated in all directions. I had been a wife and viewed marriage from the inside, and here was my opportunity to interview its twin monster, prostitution.

Statistics tell us that the average length of the prostitute's life is five years, but as to the cause that so soon destroys life, we are left in the dark. We cannot believe it is the sexual commerce, in and of itself, for we know that the same men who associate with the harlot, also mingle freely in the home life of the pure, the virtuous, and the good. The patrons of one class of women are the husbands of the other ; so, unless a "fountain can at the same time send forth sweet and bitter waters," these men cannot carry disease and death to the brothel, without also bringing disease and death to their homes.

I wish I could present to you the picture, as it has been revealed to me, of the perils and persecutions that pursue the foot-steps of the prodigal daughter while traveling the downward road to ruin and death. Let me try, and perhaps I can show the causes that induce premature death. We will take the case of one, neither better nor worse than her sister women : she has fallen in the struggle for subsistence, and, turning her back on all she has hitherto valued in life, her hope, her pride, her good name and her self respect, she forsakes want and accepts shame ; leaves a cold and cheerless room and goes to a home of luxury and splendor ; changes her shabby garments for fine and costly raiment, and eats till she is satisfied, without a fear that to morrow's bread will not be forthcoming. She now lives in a "high toned," fancy establishment, one that is patronized by gentlemen who make up our first class in society ; she is, for the time being, a favorite with the habitues of the place, and has plenty of leisure and plenty of cash ; she is surrounded with pleasant associates, and is courted, flattered and caressed ; she revels in luxurious indolence, and declares herself a fortunate and happy woman. Were it not for an unspoken feeling of sadness and shame, when she remembers that she is scorned and despised by virtuous people, she might, perhaps, be satisfied and content.

But a favorite in a brothel is such only till new faces appear ; and because the same forces that conspired to bring her to this place, are still operating to bring in others, it is not long until she sees the fond attentions she has hitherto received transferred to new arrivals. She very soon comprehends the "true inwardness" of the situation, and begins to regard those about her with suspicion. Gradually the house gets too full and she is made to feel herself one too many ; so she prepares for a change, and sets about finding another boarding place. She is cordially welcomed in another house, but when there, discovers that she has taken another step downward. She realizes that she has been crowded out of the choice place, and that she has crowded some one below herself, who,

in consequence of this constant pressure, caused by the coming in of new recruits, has displaced another lower still. She soon learns that there are as many different grades in houses of ill fame as there are different classes of men in the community, and that the woman who finds her way into a first class house, is, as soon as she ceases to be a "winning card" there, crowded out and obliged to seek shelter in one of a lower grade: being systematically forced down, down, ever downward, nor is she permitted to halt nor rest, until she reaches the very last and lowest den of drunkenness and debauch.

She is now in a second class house, patronized by second class men, and begins to taste the bitterness of prostitution. She comprehends the full horror of her position, and O, if she only could, how gladly would she go back to hard labor again. To escape the terrible fate she sees before her, she would welcome the hardest task, and the plainest fare, and endure them, if she must, until death released her. But this cannot be; the door to honest industry is barred and bolted against the prostitute; and besides, there is a demand for her lower down. The men who compose the lower classes are just as hungry for human flesh as their richer neighbors, and just as firm believers in the doctrine that "woman was made for man," but, lacking the wealth wherewith to work the ruin of unfortunate girls, the brothels they frequent are kept full by receiving the discarded inmates from those of a higher grade. Every move is downward! The road to ruin grows darker and more dismal at every step, but she can neither stop nor turn back. The power that "regulates prostitution" is heard in the voice of a policeman, crying "move on, *move on!* don't block up the way, make room for others, MOVE ON!" and if she does not move on, quickly too, she is arrested, dragged before a police court, fined and perhaps given a few months in jail.

Nine out of every ten of the noisy quarrels and fights, among the inmates of brothels, are caused by the persistent refusal to "move on," of some poor, desperate creature, who is crazed and maddened by the prospect before her. She began her career of prostitution in the society of men who were, perhaps, her superiors in education and social culture, has found her peers and passed them in her gradual descent, and now the men she is compelled to associate with, are so coarse and brutal that she shrinks from them, and dares the consequences of a brawl rather than step to a lower level. Wild, reckless and defiant, careless of herself, she takes to whiskey or morphine, rushing madly on, hating and hated, fighting her way with "tooth and nail" against fearful odds. At every turn she is met by an officer of the law, who hurries and jostles her along, arresting her often and clubbing her sometimes, forcing her on and down until the "last ditch" receives her.

This officer is not any more cruel than the civilization he represents. He is simply doing his duty according to laws framed for the especial

purpose of "regulating the social evil," and maintaining a show of order and respectability. This business of regulating the social evil takes on an appearance of morality and virtue that is misleading and hypocritical in the highest degree. The laws claiming to regulate prostitution have no kindly consideration for the poor prostitute. They were made by men, for the convenience of men ; the secrecy and safety of men in the pursuit of sexual pleasure being their only end and aim. The danger to masculine secrecy consists in the tendency of prostitutes to become too numerous, to be on friendly terms with each other, to visit back and forth, and gossip about their patrons. To prevent this the regulating process must be worked so as to keep the death rate just high enough to balance the increase. There must always be a pretext for the arrest and punishment of these women ; and they are dealt with harshly or otherwise, just in proportion as they menace the safety or contribute to the enjoyment of the "men about town." It is something like a log-drive on a river : the girls are the logs, their environment the madly rushing waters, and police officers are the men stationed along the banks with spike-poles to keep them in the current and hasten them on to perdition, lest a jam should occur and society be scandalized thereby.

I have dealt with this subject chiefly in its bearings on working girls, because I know it best in this direction. Different influences may operate to ensnare other classes of women, but, whether it be destitution, seduction or amorous tendencies, when once drawn into this whirlpool of death, there is no difference in the treatment they receive from society and government. Ostracised by society, outlawed by government, haunted by old memories, abused by their patrons, hunted and harrassed by the police, arrested, fined, imprisoned,—is it any wonder they die ?

"None are so blind as those who will not see," but, refusing to see an unpleasant truth does not make it less true. We may resolutely shut our eyes and try to persuade ourselves that our conjugal relations are regulated on a monogamic basis ; may proudly point to our schools and churches, our advance in art and literature, our wonderful inventions, our immense manufactories and extensive commerce, our importance as a nation and our growth as a people ; but, whether we recognize it or not, the awful fact is before us, that sexual prostitution, the social evil, this monstrous maelstrom of perdition is continually circling and seething in our midst ; carrying down to its fathomless depths one hundred thousand women every year. Social ostracism and legal persecution give to these waters of death their fearful impetus, while industrial injustice, poverty and want push and crowd the victims into the dreadful vortex.

This is a terrible picture, and yet it only feebly portrays the more terrible reality, carefully hidden and covered up as some shameful thing, but at the same time sustained, perpetuated and considered necessary

for the preservation of outward decency and good order : prostitution being regarded as a sort of under-ground sewer, through which escapes so much of the lewdness and sensualism generated in totally depraved human natures, that the upper stories of our social structure are fit dwelling places for virtuous wives and legitimate children.

We are told by those who deprecate all agitation of the social question, that it will inevitably destroy the home, and that the home is essential for the best interests of children ; that to make home what it should be, there must be but one lawful wife, who is the mother of the children and the mistress of the home. They grow eloquent over the advantages and excellences of monogamy, besides investing it with a great deal of religious sanctity, which they somehow gather to themselves and absorb as they proceed, until they really seem to glow with goodness. The question of prostitution they shun if possible, but if pressed, will solemnly say that it is inevitable, and must be tolerated as an escape valve for the passions of men that would otherwise make it unsafe for our wives and daughters to walk the public streets. It is the price of virtue, and virtue must be protected at whatever cost. In other words, prostitutes are the mudsills upon which the home is builded, and without them monogamic marriage would fall in ruins.

Now, if the prostitute is just as necessary to the welfare of society as the wife, then her calling is just as honorable and she is entitled to equal consideration. If she is forbidden the joy of motherhood that wives may possess their homes and their children in safety, if her shame is the price of their honor, her crucifixion, their redemption ; surely, instead of being driven by cruel treatment to premature death, she should receive due protection during her time of useful service and be kindly cared for in her old age. I would suggest a pension equal to that paid to wounded and disabled soldiers. Such a proposition may be startling at first, but sober, second thought will show that it is in perfect harmony with the popular idea of a money value in the sexuality of woman, which underlies our entire social system, finds legal expression in statute law, is acknowledged in the marriage contract, and is recognized in every court where money is awarded to a defrauded husband, just as much as it is in the business transactions of a brothel.

It seems so clear to me that all our laws, customs and traditions bearing on the relations of the sexes, had their rise in barbarism that I wonder all do not recognize the fact. The status of the wife, like that of the prostitute, was established before the thought of women's rights had entered the mind of any one. The passional gratification of man being the chief consideration, our laws regulating marriage were not framed for the protection of the wife, the education of the children, nor the welfare of the home, but to protect each man from the encroachments of all other men and insure him the peaceable possession of the woman he claimed ;

consequently, as civilization advances all these laws must be either wholly repealed or largely modified. Much has already been done in this direction, but much more must be accomplished before woman occupies her rightful place, side by side with man, his acknowledged peer in all things. The divine right of man to rule over woman is no longer accepted as a theory, and in good time all the old statutes in accordance therewith will be numbered among the "blue laws." The woman suffrage advocates claim for woman the rights of citizenship ; the labor reformers ask for her equal chance and opportunity in all the avenues of business ; Free Lovers demand for her the ownership of herself and the emancipation from sexual bondage : all these demands are included in woman's equality, and when they are gained will give us a sure foundation on which to build a higher and better order of social and domestic life.

No thinking person, who is also a philanthropist, will willingly accept the theory that prostitution is inevitable, or rest satisfied until a social system is evolved so completely in harmony with our human nature that there will no longer exist in man a demand for the prostitution of woman. But in order to achieve this, there must be full and free opportunity for discussion and investigation. We know that, not only prostitution, but nearly every case of marital discord has its root in the strange disparity that exists in the sexual needs and desires of husbands and wives ; and we ask, is this a normal condition ? Are husbands excessive in their demands, or wives morbid in their apathy ; or, are they each equally divergent from a natural condition ? Is not this disparity the result of the slavish position held by woman in the sexual partnership ? In a condition of perfect equality, would not woman develop to a sexual status more nearly approaching that of man ? Would not association with a healthy, womanly woman be so much more satisfactory and beneficial to a man, that all abnormal desire would subside, and his treatment of woman be more manly and just ? Would not a larger endowment of sexual power, on the part of women, fit them to become better wives and happier mothers of healthier children ? These are some of the questions the members of this League propose to talk about, and to keep on talking about them until people wake up to the fact that they are of vital interest to human welfare. We come to the consideration of these subjects with clean hands and pure motives, and our good work will go on regardless either of ridicule or slander.

I would like above all things to see this hitherto impassable gulf between the wife and the courtesan, dug by jealousy and hate and kept open by prejudice and ignorance, so effectually bridged over that each would regard the other as a sister and co-laborer instead of a rival and enemy. The one is termed virtuous the other fallen, one is honorable the other infamous, but both are women and both are filling positions

provided for and forced upon them by old customs and superstitions that had their origin when men were little better than savages. Both are actually bought and sold in the sexual market, regulated and governed by laws they have no voice in making, and by circumstances they cannot control. If these two classes of women could be persuaded to forget their antagonism, and join hands in an effort to aid and help each other, the woman's rights movement would at once march on to success and victory. But so long as wives believe all their husbands tell them of the awfully awful badness of the Magdalen, believe her to be the incarnation of profligacy and sin, a terror to every wife, a temptation to every husband, and a danger to every home ; and Magdalen, in her turn, listens to the same husband, hears the pitiful story of his domestic infelicity, of his wife's cold indifference, her exacting selfishness, her frivolity and heartlessness, and is made to believe that the wife's jealousy and spite are the causes of the social ostracism under which she suffers, so long will the cause of woman present the hopeless spectacle of a "house divided against itself."

I can see no good reason why these women should not "pool their issues," and work together for their common welfare. The doctrine of woman's inferiority is responsible for the wrongs of both, and the struggle now in progress for woman's equality needs and should have their united support. They both love the same man, and both are wronged and deceived by the same individual. He flatters each one in turn, and then goes straitway to the other with his mouth full of slander. He arranges and plans the lives of both in a way to suit his own comfort and convenience, giving little thought to the wishes and desires of either. He systematically deceives both, believing that his own safety depends on keeping them estranged and separate, and yet, in his way, he loves both and does not dream that he is wronging either. He follows blindly in the foot-steps of his orthodox father, taking especial care not to repeat the sin of Adam by hearkening unto the voice of his wife. If these two women could come together on a friendly footing and compare notes, the chances are he would hear some wholesome truths, and perhaps be ready to take hold of the question of social reform, in a spirit more meek and tractable than the average husband is wont to manifest.

Just imagine ourselves met here in a liberal convention, with about a dozen earnest, thoughtful women from neighboring brothels, bringing to our aid all the wisdom and knowledge of the world they have gained through experience and observation, and then picture the change they would make in our programme. How many men, think you, in the presence of those who know all about the dark side of their lives, would dare get up and express the opinion that women would behave badly in a condition of social freedom, and picture a state of social anarchy and licentiousness, in which wives would all become wanton, and mothers be un-

able to tell who are the fathers of their children. These slanderous insults to womanhood, that have been mouthed over and over until they have grown stale in the using, would forever remain unspoken, and brassy impudence and falsehood would for once modestly take a back seat and keep quiet.

Now I am not saying that the monogamic relation is not the highest form of conjugal life. I simply say that the men of this day and generation are not developed to a plane high enough to make this phase of conjugality practical; that whether practiced openly as in Utah, or secretly as in Massachusetts, polygamy, in some guise, is the almost universal practice of Christendom; and that the make-believe monogamy we have among us is a hideous sham, bought with prostitution and clothed with hypocrisy and lies.

The fact that five hundred thousand abandoned women are continually with us, every little town and village having its due proportion, is sufficient proof that the husband who keeps his marriage vows is an exception to the general rule. All these women are either seduced or bought into the ranks of prostitution by somebody; somebody sustains them in their business, pays for their food and raiment, and wears them out at the rate of a hundred thousand a year. In the face of all this we find men who have the effrontery to profess to believe that the agitation of the social question will injure the good morals of the community, and ask for laws to suppress it. They are blind to the libertinism of the rest of the nation, but for the polygamy of Utah they invoke severe legislation. Ministers and statesmen alike are straining at the Mormon gnat and swallowing the orthodox camel. Not until the superfluous wives of Mormondom are legislated down to a level with prostitutes will these righteous men be content,—and all in the name of virtue. In the name of virtue! O, men, fathers and brothers, how long will you deceive yourselves and try to deceive us? You claim to be generous towards woman, and yet you systematically deceive and defraud her. You affect great regard for her virtue, while your own is neglected and forgotten. You regulate industry in a way that crushes her, excludes her altogether from many kinds of remunerative labor, gives her less pay than man receives for the same work, then you figure in the sex market as a buyer, and yet tell us you deplore prostitution.

"More in sorrow than in anger" I tell you these things, for I know that tyranny and wrong are the heritage of both man and woman, handed down in the customs and institutions of past ages, but it is not the part of wisdom to endure them longer. The demand of this age is for exact and impartial justice, justice between man and man, and justice between man and woman, always remembering that all assumptions of generosity are but so many insults, until justice is fully satisfied.

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